

Thomas Johnson to George Washington, January 24, 1775, Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers. Published by the Society of the Colonial Dames of America. Edited by Stanislaus Murray Hamilton.

FROM THOMAS JOHNSON, ESQ.

ANNAPO 24 Jany 1775.

DEAR SR.

Our printer assuring us in his last weeks paper that there would be a further prorogation of our Assembly and the very doubtful State of American Affairs induced me to think that Nothing would probably be attempted in your Assembly the ensuing Session. This Morning about 11 OClock I reced your two Letters by Mr. Stewart dated the 20 Instant and this Afternoon Mr. Ballendine came to see me on the Subject of them

I should have needed Nothing more than your Desire to have waited on the Gent. at Alexandria on Thursday if it was in my power but I am so circumstanced that I cannot oblige you My Time has been lately so much engrossed with Committee Business and Things of the kind that I have been obliged for a Week or ten Days past to be plodding over my Law Affairs every Oppertunity with more than common Assiduity and I shall with great Difficulty be able to get my Terms pleading done by the last Day of this Month against which Day they must be finished I believe owing to an Anxiety which I cannot quiet on public Matters I am in but an indifferent State of Health nor could I, if for that Reason alone, just now undertake the proposed journey with tolerable Convenience I had resolved therefore to send you off my Thoughts tomorrow which I do by Mr. Ballendine though the Time will not allow me to reduce them to the full Draft of a Bill and despairing of ever

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seeing Poto. made navigable on the plan I most wished it you may depend on my best Endeavours to get a Bill passed here similar to yours whether upon giving a ffee Simple in fiat & invariable Tolls or having the Tolls ascertained anew from Time to Time with onely to a limitted profit per Cent in the Cost and Repairs of the Work or giving a Term only with a still higher profit. I may possibly be insensibly led by my own particular Interest to view the Advantages of Navigation on the River as more general and extensive than I ought but I really believe if I had not a ffoot of Land above the ffalls I should be as warm a ffriend to the Scheme Unless the our Assembly will so far assist us as to emit a Sum of Money for Loan to the Subscribers I do assure you I do not think that those on our Side who would most willingly subscribe will be able to do any Thing clever. I myself am in such a Situation that I cannot raise any Sum of Money without selling a part of the very Estate to be benefited by the Scheme on very low Terms at present in these Times and manny with whom I have spoke on the Subject are circumstanced as myself I should think nothing of risking a good deal and might prudently do it all Chances considered but in these Times many want to borrow and but few to lend Money I do not know where 500£ could be got on the Secty of 5000.

Genl Lees plan has been delayed some Time for a plate I am told it is now nearly doue & I hope to have the pleasure of sending you some Copies soon—There has been more Alacrity shewn by our people than I expected but we are but illy prepared with Arms &c I am apprehensive that the vigilance of the Govt. at home will make it necessary for us to turn our Thoughts towards an internal Supply of Materials¹

I am sr. with the greatest Regard Your most obedt. Servant THS: JOHNSON JUNR

¹ At this time committees were forming, militia being raised, and taxes levied for arms and ammunition all over the country. Others there were in America who looked upon the advocates of liberty as a handful of reckless and dangerous fanatics. "in the Philadelphia Papers," writes a gentleman from Baltimore, January 27, 1775, "you will perceive that some persons in this Town have had the imbecility to approve of the frantick proceedings of certain men, who lately styled themselves Delegates to a Provincial Congress, (with the same truth and propriety, indeed, they might have called themselves Electors of the Holy Roman Empire,) abandoned to every sense of decency, propriety, and loyalty, have also in their turn, haberdashed certain Resolves extremely curious. This Town is chiefly settled by Scotch-Irish, (in liberality of sentiment at least three centuries behind

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even the other British subjects in America,) and it is a melancholy truth, that such are to a man, violently bent on supporting the good old cause (that is the cause of fanaticism and sedition,) by taking Arms against the best Government (with all its imperfections) on earth. You see, sir, they have ordered three thousand pounds of Powder, and twelve thousand pounds of Lead, to be immediately purchased. While I compassionate their delusion, I cannot forbear smiling at their insanity, and at their gasconades. They have assessed the immense sum of ten thousand Pounds currency, (by-the-bye, it is not yet raised, though they accept the humble sums of two Shillings and six Pence from subscribers,) to oppose an Empire, who, last war, for years, expended only the trifling sums of twenty millions Sterling annually.” Others again wrote: “We by no means desire to shake off our duty or allegiance to our lawful Sovereign, but on the contrary, shall ever glory in being the loyal subjects of a Protestant Prince, descended, from such illustrious progenitors ... but if no pacifick measures shall be proposed or adopted by Great Britain, and our enemies will attempt to dragoon us out of those inestimable privileges, which we are entitled to as subjects, and to reduce us to a state of slavery, we declare that we are deliberately and resolutely determined never to surrender them to any power upon earth, but at the expense of our lives.” A less conservative element still was expressed by Adam Stephen writing to Richard Henry Lee: “Let us be firm, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against us. A handful of men in Canada, six broken Regiments from France, withstood, for five years, all the force of British Fleets and Armies, from home, and fifteen or twenty thousand Americans, every campaign. They gained several victories over us, and chance had a great hand in their reduction at last. What can we do, if united? We only want a Navy to give law to the world, and we have it in our power to get it.”